

APR IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What is the APR Improvement Program?

- A. The APR Improvement Program (AIP) is a program that provides business planning, technical assistance and grants to active commercial farms with land that has already been protected through the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program. The purpose of AIP is to help participating farms stay profitable and keep APR land in active agricultural use.

Q. Who is eligible to apply to the Program?

- A. Eligible responders must be operators of farmland that has been protected through funding from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program for at least 3 years and have been actively farming this APR property for at least the past 3 years. Farms owned by non-profit organizations are ineligible for this Program. Specific eligibility requirements may vary from year to year and can be found during open application periods in the Request for Response for the APR Improvement Program at <http://www.mass.gov/agr/programs/aip>.

Q. Am I eligible to apply to the Program if I don't own the APR property that I am farming?

- A. If you are a farm manager or operator on an APR farm that you do not own, you may co-apply with the landowner. Signatures of both the owner(s) and the operator should be on the application.

Q. Am I eligible to apply if I have already participated and received grant funding from the Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP)?

- A. If you have already participated in FVEP and your covenant has expired, you may apply to AIP. However, your application will receive a lower ranking in the selection process than APR farms that have not received FVEP assistance and grant funding from the Department.

Q. How are applications reviewed and selected?

- A. The AIP review committee reviews each eligible application based on a predetermined set of selection criteria that are listed in the current Request for Response. Those applications that best meet these criteria will receive the highest ratings for selection.

Q. How does the Program work?

- A. If selected for Phase I of the program, a team is organized for the participating farm comprised of professionals from various disciplines which may include agriculture, marketing, finance, management, engineering or environmental sciences. Following an assessment of the farm's financial records, management practices, buildings, and natural resources, the team will make recommendations for improving the viability of the farm. The recommendations would be prioritized with the farmer and contained in a business plan for the farm. If planned improvements and use of funds meet the objectives of the Program and the farm moves to

Phase II, eligible farmers would receive a grant from the Department to implement improvements identified in the plan.

Q. What if I already have a business plan for my farm?

- A. The business planning process may be abbreviated if the farm already has a full business plan that has recently been completed. However, participating farmers must still go through Phase I of the Program in which technical assistance is provided and a business plan update or enterprise plan developed in order to help the farmer identify the best use of funds to improve the viability of the farm while meeting Program objectives.

Q. How much money is available to farmers that are selected to participate in the Program?

- A. Technical assistance and the development of a business plan are provided at no cost to the farmer. Farmers who participate in completing a plan and then move to Phase II may be eligible for a grant award of either up to \$25,000; up to \$50,000; or up to \$75,000, depending on factors including the number of acres under APR, gross revenues of the farm, and needs identified in the business plan. The provision of grants is dependent upon available funding and award levels are determined at the end of Phase I planning.

Q. What can AIP grant funds be used for?

AIP grant funds must be spent primarily on approved infrastructure improvements to the land resource or farm outbuildings on the farm that will support or enhance the farm property. Some examples of eligible resource improvements include reseeding hay fields, reclaiming pastureland, establishing orchards and other perennial crops, improving drainage, or installing irrigation or fencing. Funds may also be used for new or improved farm outbuildings such as a processing facility, livestock housing, storage barn or farmstand.

Q. What is the timeline for the Program, and when do participating farms receive the grant funding?

- A. The open application period for AIP typically occurs on an annual basis, with the Request for Response and application available in early April and due towards the end of June. Applications to AIP are reviewed over the summer and farmers are notified in the fall as to whether or not they have been accepted into the Program. Phase I business planning and technical assistance for participating farms typically begins in November, takes 5 to 6 months, and should be completed by April of the following calendar year. Eligible farms that sign contracts with the Department should receive grants 4 to 5 weeks after that - typically by late spring or early summer of the year following the year that farms are accepted into the Program.

Q. How do I apply to the Program?

- A. A Request for Response which contains an application to the program may be found on the program web page at <http://www.mass.gov/agr/programs/aip> during open application periods, which typically begin in late spring each year, dependent upon available funding, with applications due in late June. Potential responders should read the Request for Response thoroughly, as the content including eligibility requirements and due date may vary from year to year. Copies of applications may also be obtained by contacting the APR Improvement Program at (413) 268-8269 or Melissa.AdamsAIP@gmail.com